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SOME OF THE THINGS MOTHER ENDURED DURING THE WAR

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Some of the Things Mother Endured During the War, 1861 to 1865

By Mrs. Margaret Dixon Davis Philyaw
1916

She went through so much, that it is hard to know where to begin.

Her first heart-ache, however, was the parting with her boys, as she called them; one, her nephew, whom she had loved and petted always, he being the first baby in the family since she was a baby, and he was idolized by the entire family. He is now Dr. W. D. Mc Millan, surgeon of the Wilmington Camp of United Confederate Veterans. He was only a boy in his teens then. The other one was father's youngest brother, whom mother raised as her own, his mother having died just before father and mother were married. She took the baby brother and mothered him. She said when those two boys' arms were unclasped (at different times, they did not leave together) from around her neck, and they marched away to face the cannon's mouth, she felt that her heart would break. But that was only a beginning of the many things she was to suffer during that awful struggle. Those boys, (sixteen and nineteen years old), had left school to join the Army.

Father's brother, William Thomas Davis, enlisted in Captain Kenan's Company, mobilized at Kenansville, N. C., the boy's former home. He spent his summers there with his father, and was devoted to Captain Kenan, and marched away with him, a noble looking fellow in his suit of grey, the little short jacket with brass buttons up the front, Mother thought, made a splendid picture. She was proud of her boys, yet it wrung her heart to part with them. Her nephew was wounded twice during the war, and came home alive, after the fearful struggle was over. Father's brother never came home again. He was in the seven day's fight around Richmond, Va. The night after the seventh one was fought, they were in camp just outside of the City Limits, he dreamed that he was going to be killed in the next engagement, and that he would never see Mother again. The dream was before him all day; he told his comrades that he never was superstitious, but he really believed that dream was a presentiment to him. They laughed at him, and said he was feverish from the excitement of the last battle. He rode into Richmond, and had his picture made, an old-fashioned daguerreotype, and went back to camp, wrote Mother the prettiest letter I ever read, and sent his picture, with a curl from his manly head, and placed it in the back of the picture under the glass. They came with the letter to Mother. He told her of his dream, and that he felt that it was really going to happen, and thanked her for all the loving kindness and tender, careful training she had given him, calling her his sweet sister-mother, and his last thoughts would be of her. I have seen my mother read that letter, yellow with age, look at the hair and picture, and weep many times.

The next morning after he rode back to Camp, orders came to march to the borders of Maryland, and he was fatally wounded at Gettysburg, then he was taken to Washington City to a hospital, and died.

Father didn't hear of it for some time afterwards, and just as soon as he could go to Washington, after it was all over, he did and tried to locate his grave, but could not. The hospital that he died in had been burned and all records lost. They supposed he was buried at Arlington, with all the others who died there, but we could never find out positively.

Many years after the war was over, and Father made back some of his money, he spent a great deal trying to locate the grave, but was unsuccessful.

Mother was then to part with her brother's only son, David Wright, who was in the Junior Reserves, Company A-9 Battalion, commanded by Captain T. L. Hybart. He did duty at Smithville, now Southport, and at other points on the Cape Fear River below Wilmington, N. C. He died of pneumonia caused by exposure on the river at Southport, N. C., on the 18th day of December, 1864.



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Captain Ed. Armstrong, father's first cousin was killed; also a connection, George McMillan. Captain Ed. Armstrong and George McMillan's names are on the roll of honor kept by the Cape Fear Chapter, Daughters of the Confederacy, and read every memorial Day. Mother said that of the five boys whom she loved so dearly, only Dr. McMillan came back to her. The other four gave their noble lives for the cause.

Father owned Castle Hayne plantation, where the Castle Hayne Station now stands. After the war it was sold to Dr. Hogg, of Raleigh, and he sold it to the State for a Penitentiary Farm. Between the Castle Haynes depot and the ferry, on the main road was a scrubby oak thicket, the trees having been kept small for hoop poles. The Confederates cut down this thicket and camped there. The woods was filled with the white tents as far up as the church, there was a large frame house which was the home for all the preachers. Mother entertained ministers of all the denominations who preached in that church. She organized a Sunday School, and many a heart-sick, lonely boy, far away from home, was comforted and taught a better knowledge of the Savior, through her influence in that little Sunday School.

The white house sat in a grove on a high hill overlooking the river, across from where the Castle Haynes Depot stands now. I was born there, in that house, and lived there until just before the war broke out, when we moved to Glenn Mary, on the Rose Hill Plantation, owned by my Mother, and just a few miles down the Castle Haynes road. The negro quarters were there, and the overseer also, so we moved to Glenn Mary. The Confederates took the house on the river for the Officer's headquarters, and it was afterwards used as a hospital and finally burned by the Carpet Baggers after the War. The Church stood about two squares from where the Railroad bridge crosses the river. The soldiers were kept there in camp during the war, and the church was also used for a hospital, at times.

Father was in the home guard, as he was too old to go with the troops. He walked guard on the river front in Wilmington. Mother and the children were left on the plantation with just the negroes for protection. They were true slaves, most of them, yet some deserted her and went to the Yankees. All of the old family slaves were loyal. The deserters were slaves that had been bought just before the War. One was a Guinae Negro and his wife bought from the Hermitage, on the Burgwin Estate. He was worse than a deserter. Mother used to have good things cooked and packed in large baskets, then she would take the children in the carriage and have Albert or George (they were the family coachmen) to drive her over to Camp with food for the soldiers. She also carried all the good literature she could get. She did not know that there was a Camp of the enemy on the other side of the river, near Rocky Point. George and Albert had been sent to town with provisions and fresh clothing for my father, who was still walking guard, so Mother took this Guinae negro to drive her. The negroes had heard all the wonderful tales about what the Yankees were going to do for them, (but never did). He and his wife planned to run away and go to them. She was to leave after the carriage had gone, but by a nearer road, and he was to drive Mother to the Yankee Camp instead of the Confederate side of the river. When father went away, he gave mother a small pistol and told her to make a pocket under her belt and carry it always, for she would never know when she would have to use it. She said, after they were on the road a little way, she noticed a strange expression on his face. He looked like a very demon, his eyes flashing, and his long white teeth protruding from his thick black lips. She said she knew that she was in for trouble when she looked at him. They reached the fork in the road and instead of going straight, he turned the horses toward the ferry to go to the Yankees. She asked him why he did not go straight, and he said that he had her now, and he was "a-grinw to tuck her and her younguns to his folks". She said the truth daamed then upon her. The drive had made the children sleepy and they were leaning against each arm. She slipped her hand out from under brother, and drew her pistol and levelled it on his head and told him if he did not turn those horses and drive fast to the Confederate Camp, she would shoot him through.

It took the negro so by surprise, he did not know that she was armed, and just then something ran across the road and frightened the horses, and they plunged forward, almost throwing the carriage over, but turned around and ran just as fast as they could, so that the man had to pay attention to them, or he would be thrown from the carriage. God was with her, she said; she believed that God caused the horses to get frightened to save her life, and her children. She kept the pistol pointed at his head until she was safe in the Confederate Camp. If the horses had kept quiet, that big Guinae negro could have slapped the pistol out of her hand



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in a flash and overpowered her, but he was frightened; they are always cowards when in a tight place. The officers sent some of our men to see her safely home, and took the negro prisoner. We never heard of, nor saw him again. And that is the way the Confederates found that the Yankees had pitched their tents on the other side of the river, near Rocky Point, not so far from our picket line. There were not many, but they outnumbered the Confederate Camp.

Father was guarding the Rebel's supplies under Captain Hewlett, when he fell at his post, unconscious, with yellow fever. He was taken to the old Rock Spring Hotel, but they didn't know what was the matter with him, until Dr. James Dickson came to him. He also was taken with it at the same time, but he came to father with the fever on him, and said they both had it, the worst kind. He sent for Dr. William J. Love, who was a student, I think, under Dr. Dickson, and I am not quite sure, but I think they were in the Army. Dr. Dickson said, "Billie, you must get Sam ~~Billie~~ Davis out of town tonight or he will be a dead man by morning. If the fresh air from the pines does not save, then he is gone." He was one of the very few who had black vomit and lived. Dr. Dickson said, "I have the fever on me now, and I feel that I will not live, but Sam must be spared to his wife and babies; he must not die, Billie! Go with him through the lines." Dr. Dickson gave him his horse (there were no others to be had then.) He wrote out the directions how he should be nursed and sent them to Mother. She had always been a great pet with him since her early childhood. He told her just what to do, and when it should be done, and I, a twelve year old girl then, remember well seeing Mr. John St. George and Dr. William J. Love bringing Father in the house in the middle of the night, and he looked like he was dead.

Mother an old black mammy nursed him, and that was just before my brother Sam was born. Father came very near dying, and I don't think he was very strong after that. It had been an extremely cold winter, and a very hot summer after that, and he had walked guard all those bitter cold nights, and stood so many hardships from extreme heat and cold, that he was not ~~XX~~ accustomed to. It told on his health for many years afterwards.

Dear old Dr. Dickson died with yellow fever September 22nd, 1862. My father was the last person he attended. Dr. Dickson was one of the grandest men this town ever produced. A number of years afterwards, Mother named her youngest child Margaret Dickson, for the dear old doctor and his beloved wife. When Father began to improve, and get out, he was very weak, but the government needed salt, and he owned many negroes, so he rented the sound front from Mr. Kit Morse at Greenville Sound, and opened up salt works. He sat in his buggy when he was too weak to stand, and directed the negroes how to make salt. This he did until he was taken ill again. While he was so very sick he thought he would never be able to work them any more, so he sold the salt works to Mr. William Reston of Wilmington, and he made salt for the government, and his wife, who is now Mrs. Lou Bolles, made ink of gall-berries, and sold it to the soldiers to write home with. When Father recovered from the second illness, he went further down the sound and opened up other salt works, for the Confederacy needed all the salt they could get. He operated along the Sound about where Money Island is situated, or in front of where Mr. Percy Cowan now lives, and some of the old salt vats were on the shore up to a few years ago. He was making salt when he was called to go to Fort Fisher. Every man and boy who could shoot a gun was called.

He left the salt works in charge of his faithful negroes and went to Glenn Mary to tell Mother and the children good-bye, and all knew that it was going to be a bloody fight. He was so weak he could hardly carry a gun. Complications had set in from exposure, but he went. It was Christmas Day. I shall never forget that Christmas; the house was full of company for dinner. Mother packed all she could that father could take in a knapsack, everyone bade him God-speed, and ate their dinner, except poor mother and I. We excused ourselves, impolite as it was, we could not help it, and sat on the steps and watched Father go down the long Avenue to the main road and out of sight. Mother and I both cried ourselves sick, our hearts were almost breaking; The roaring of the cannon shook the house and broke some of the windows. The men were passing all day, going to meet the enemy. Old and young, every one who could handle a gun went.



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They were sent part of the way down the river several times, but were turned back each time. It was the second attack, I think, when they were on their way to the fort again on a barge or flat boat and could not make much headway against the tide, when the fort was blown up, and they received orders to turn back, that the fort had fallen and they knew that meant the fall of the confederacy, for really the fall of Ft. Fisher was the decisive blow. Orders came to retreat, or they would be either killed or taken prisoner. They heard the explosion and saw the mass of black smoke mingled with brick and cement, and human bodies in the air when the fort fell. All was confusion. They did retreat and made their way to the ferry, to warn the few soldiers who were left to guard the river there, for all knew that Wilmington would soon be taken, and all hope for the confederacy was gone.

The Fort was captured January 15th 1865, but the first battle was Christmas day, December 25th 1864, and the City of Wilmington was taken by the yankees on the 22nd day of February 1865, Mother and mammy and her son black George, to drive us into town, the day of the 21st, as the men at the river at Castle Hayne had told her that it was not safe for her to stay there, and they expected that there might be a little fight along there between Prince George Creek and Broad Water or DeRossett Branch, which was there. The branch was just a few hundred yards from Glen Mary, our house, and it was filled up when the Castle Haynes road was macadamized not many years ago. They told us we must get to town quickly. We packed the few clothes that we could, took some beds, and bed linens and started, leaving our faithful nurse to save all she could. We knew that they would not harm the colored people, and the negro quarters were far enough for them to be out of danger. Mother took black Mammy, the old woman who had nursed her, with us to care for the children. Black George drove us to where Mrs. Dr. Potter now lives on Market Street. Mrs. McCaleb lived there then and took a few boarders. Soon after we got in, shells began to fly over the city. We all got down to the basement for fear they would burst on the house. That was an awful night. Just as our men expected, after the City was taken and the Yankees were plundering the country around that camp over the river started to march into the city. The Confederates met them at Prince George Creek and they had Quite a skirmish.

They fought across DeRossett branch, up and down the road into the orchard and yard at Glenn Mary. Our men that were left to guard the river there, and were just waiting for the city to be taken and they expected to lay wait everything between the Ferry and the city, as they went along, but our little handful of men were ready for them. They had taken down the fences from around Glenn Mary, and made pontoon bridges, not over the ferry, but nearly two miles up the Northeast River at Rose Hill, below of Glenn Mary. So when they crosses the ferry, and marched towards Wilmington, the rebels met them at Prince George Creek. They roze up and made it so hot for them. They were more in numbers to start with, but our men got the best of them, wounding so many they fled towards the swamp and the Confederates made their way to the North East River and crossed on their pontcons and took them up after they crossed. Our men came out ahead of them if they did have the city. Everything was in confusion and not much was said about this skirmish, and the histories that were accepted were written by Norther men.

After the Confederates were gone, the Yankees that were not wounded came out of the swamp, took up the wounded and carried them to our house at Glen Mary. Their wounded were lying on the ground all around the house. They stacked Mother's furniture out in the yard, all except what they wanted to use, to make room for the cots, and set fire to it. They took axes and broke her piano all to pieces, because it was too heavy to move, and burned it. They had shot holes all through the house and played havoc generally. They used that house for some time, and did all the harm they could. When they did leave, they took everything they could carry with them, and then set fire to the house. Black Mammy's daughter, Magg, was my mother's maid from her girlhood. She knew that she could trust Magg, so she left her with her husband and many of the other negroes, to take care of the home as best they could. Most of the negroes ran when they saw the Yankees coming, and hid in the swamp. Some of them came out, made friends with the Yankees and finally went away with the enemy. Black Mammy, Albert, the carriage driver and Magg, the maid were faithful as long as they lived.

After Mother and the children had gone to town for protection, Magg gathered up what she could of jewelry and silver, ripped up the floor in the living room, had her husband to dig a deep



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hole and buried the box, nailed the flooring back down and put the carpet over it all. There was one little corner they didn't have time to nail down good, and one of the Yankee Officers noticed it. (They made the servants wait on them all the time that they were there.), so this man asked her one day about that carpet in the corner. She wouldn't tell him anything he wanted to know. He had his men rip up the carpet and flooring and they took long iron rods that they must have carried around for such purposes, and sounded the ground all underneath where the floor was. They found nothing. It made them so mad they pointed a big horse pistol at Mag's head and the Captain said that if she did not tell him what was buried there, that they would kill her then and there.

She was always an impudent negro, to every one whom she did not like, but very respectful to those she did like, and she wasn't afraid of anyone, or anything. She was an exception to the rule. She looked that Yankee Captain square in the face, putting her hands on her hips, and said, "Kill me, Suh. I ain't got but one time to die, and I would rather die now than be left here with you Yankee Varmints!" He lowered his pistol to his side and said, "No, I will not kill you this time, you black wench; you are too faithful to die." She said she knew that they did not miss that box a foot, for they drove that iron rod all around just as deep as it would go. It was that same day that they set fire to the house, and marched away and left it to burn. Those faithful negroes tried to put it out, but could do nothing with only a few buckets and the wind very high. Magg saw Mother's mahogany bureau, one of the few things they had not burned before. She said the vision of a pretty miss, standing before the bureau for her to lace up her dress in the back, came before her, and she also saw the miss sitting in front of the mirror for her to comb out her long curly brown hair. She called Nimrod, her husband, and said, "Nim, we can't let Misses' bureau burn up, we can't." They rushed in that burning building and dragged it out. It was heavy and they couldn't carry it very well. She pulled Mother's portrait from the wall, an oil painting made of her when she graduated from Old Salem College, she was 18 years old then. Magg tore the canvas a little, but saved it. A cameo pin that Father gave Mother just before they were married, which was in the box that was buried with the few things, the pictures and the bureau are all that was saved, and they are still cherished by the family. The dining-room and kitchen were built away from the house, but it was connected by a long piazza latticed in, and the well was on this piazza, or platform. The Yankees poisoned the water in that well before leaving. The house burned flat to the ground, but for some reason, the dining-room and kitchen and part of the piazza, was left. That is all mother found of her once comfortable home, when she came back to it.

The firing down on the river all stopped the morning of the 22nd of February, 1865. When all hope was gone, the Mayor, who was Mr. John Dawson, went to the top of the H. B. Eilers building, which is still standing on the southeast corner of Market and Water Streets, and put up a white flag and surrendered the City to the enemy.

I stood on the upstairs piazza, where Mrs. Potter now lives on Market Street, with Brother Sam on my arms, and saw the first ones land, some at the foot of Orange Street, and most of them landing at Market Street Dock. They landed by the thousands, it seemed to me. The street was a black mass of blue coats, a squad of officers came in the house and called to Mother to come down from the piazza and prepare the very best bed in the house for a wounded colonel, and to be quick about it. He wanted no southern airs, either. They were in a hurry."

Mother turned her sweet, gentle face to that ruffian, and told him she was only a boarder in the house, but would do all she could for a wounded man, even though he were her enemy. While she was fixing the bed with her own linens, one of the soldiers came in and said something to her. She said she was so nervous and so excited she did not understand what he said, but he took the diamond pin and earrings father gave her for a wedding, from her neck and ears. Just then one of the officers stepped in and heard what he said. She didn't, except she knew that he cursed her. The officer had him sent to jail, and said to him, "Fool, can't you tell a true born lady when you see one?" He turned then to Mother and told her not to be frightened, he would see that every protection was given to her family, that they had taken the house for their officers, but would see that she and her family did not suffer for anything, and that they should have every protection, but they would have to move to the attic, and cellar, until they could find a better place. His orders were to take the house for Officer's Quarters and he had to obey. He was sorry. He was very polite and different from most of them.



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- Prints
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There was nothing to do, so we moved to the attic, and we stayed there until we could get board at the Rock Spring Hotel, some time later.

We didn't know what became of black George, after that night. We never saw him again, and his uncle George, the coachman. I never saw him again until my mother was dead, 43 years after the war. He knocked at the back door with hat in hand, and tears streaming down his old black face, and asked to see his old Missis' body, and to please let him drive the hearse to the Cemetery. He and his brother Albert had driven her every day of her life until that awful war came, and he wanted to drive Old Miss for the last time in this world. And he did. Albert had died not long before Mother died. After draying Worth and Worth ever since they went into business.

When mother finished getting the bed ready for the wounded Yankee, and the man who cursed her had been sent to jail, they brought in Colonel Corban, on a stretcher, and put him, and four others, wounded men, in Mother's bed. Then they brought in camp cots and placed two of the men on cots, and many others, not so high in rank were placed on other cots all over the house, and my Mother had to nurse those horrid Yankees back to life, as much as she hated them. Well, it was a blessing that she did, for we would have suffered for food if she had not, for the others had burnt up and stolen all we had. Grandmother Wright and the McMillans had left Sloop Point, the old family home, and gone to Fayetteville to get away from the Yankees and they wanted Mother to go with them, but she wouldn't go with the rest of the family, because she wanted to be near where she could hear from Father and send him fresh clothes and food.

The officers in that house were gentlemen, if they were Yankees. They had plenty of everything which they had stolen from us, and others, and they were so grateful to Mother for her kindness and attention to them while helpless, that they saw that we did not suffer then.

Poor Father, when he did get back to us after the war, was without a penny, not even a horse to work the farm, to make a crop, and not a rail left around the place. Then the Carpet-baggers time came, and the low, mean, trash which followed the army for greed and degradation, and the foolish negroes took up with them, and did no end of harm. They killed Mr. Ruben Pickett's father, and beat Mrs. Baker nearly to death. They thought she was dead, or they would not have left without killing her. The year after the war was something terrible and the brutality was horrible. Mother went around, like a good angel she always was, helping every one she could. While the Yankees were camping on our house at Glenn Mary, they broke open the smokehouses, took all the meat, and hauled away feed from the barns, were not satisfied with that, but stuck their bayonets through the pigs, and let them squeal until they were so weak they died, shot the cattle down, all that they couldn't take with them for meat, and when Mother went back home she did not have a chair to sit down on, or anything else. The negroes told her that when they burnt her furniture, they cursed the mahogany for smelling.

She was a wealthy woman, having inherited from her father a great many negroes, a large bank account, and some very valuable city property, which she exchanged part of, most of the square where St. John's Church is now, with some other property, for the Rose Hill Plantation of ten thousand acres, so she would have a place to put her negroes. She married a man of means also. He was a partner in the firm of McMillan and Davis, wholesale and retail merchants. Also a large bank account which was worthless after the war. He owned lands at Kenansville and Hallville, N. C. and the big plantation at Castle Haynes with a number of negroes to work it. This is very personal, but simply mentioned to show the condition that most of the business men and planters were left in. Having lived in comfort all their lives, this is what they came home to. Two rooms perforated with shot and shells, and all the furniture they had was what they could make of goods boxes. My Mother, who had been reared in luxury, had to do everything; the only help she had was poor old black Manny, who had nursed her in infancy, and her daughter Magg. Father's health gone, he was an invalid for ten years after the war. Old Clem, the man who always attended the horses, came back with some of the other negro men, (Clem died in the hospital here Jan. 19, 1921. The last thing he told me was to relate this story all over again.) Mother had these men cut wood and timber, and flat it to town to sell, and some time afterwards she had them open the brickyard. Father was then able to direct them and Mother kept the books for both the brick and timber yards. And this is the way they managed until they began to get on their feet again, but it was a hard struggle, because few



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had any money to buy with. They had all that land and nothing to pay the taxes and insurance with, most all the planters were land poor, after the war. The overseers and tenants became rich men, and their masters became poor. Hence the song, "The Overseers got in the Rich Man's House" which the negroes used to sing.

When Clem came back to the plantation, he told Mother of how they took the twelve horses and mules away from him, and when that dirty Yankee Colonel rode away on Mother's saddle horse, Fannie, she looked at him as much as to say, "Clem, don't let me go." "Old Miss, I could just see she looked when she winneid, and if I had-a-had a gun, I would's shot that Yankee rascal, if I had died the next minute."

Before Father came home, Mother went back to Glenn Mary. She had no money to keep paying board in town. (The Confederate money was no good then) One afternoon, we were out picking wild berries, and had brought them to the house when we heard the most awful pleading, we were standing on the piece of piazza that was not burned, and saw a large man kill another one. He had knocked him in the head with a cudgel, down in the branch some distance from the house. He saw us looking at him, and he began to curse and said, "He would come up there and finish the job." We ran into the house, locked windows and doors, and piled all the goods-box furniture we could get, against them. I shall never forget Mother's face. She looked at me (I was then about 16 years old) (Mrs. Rose), and said, "My darling, I would rather kill you myself now than have you fall into the hands of that brute. The man was at the back of the house by that time, cursing us and saying "if we didn't open the door he would break it in." Mother was praying all the time, and Magg and I looked through one of the holes in the house and saw a half-dozen horsemen coming up the avenue. The colored man had been sent to town to get something to eat. The man saw the horsemen coming, and he dashed for the branch. Colonel Corban, and some of his men, were ridijg for exercise, he was almost well then, and just happened to turn into that lane. They didn't know where they were going. Mother said, "You see, God took care of ma and my children all through that awful struggle." They serched for that man but he got away in the thicket. They went to the branch and buried the dead man. Our lives were saved, after that, by Yankee officers, from a negro troop which Mother always thought was the same gang that killed Mr. Ruben Pickett's father, but that is a long story, and I have wr tten too long a one already; but when I was asked to write something of the women of the South, and what they endured during that awful war, I could only write of one woman, and she was the best and purest Christian I ever knew.

The facts given and dictated by Mrs. A. P. Rose, who was the 12 year old girl spoken of when the war began. Some facts also related to Margaret Philyaw by her mother, Mrs. S. J. Davis.

Written by: Mrs. Margaret Dixon Davis Philyaw in 1916. Mrs. Charles Lee Bragg, now.



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